The Parents' Consolation on the Death of their Children.

A

SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE

PARISH CHURCH OF TYNEMOUTH,

ON SUNDAY THE SIXTH DAY OF OCTOBER, 1793.

BY WILLIAM HASWELL, LECTURER.

THE PROFITS ARISING (IF ANY) FROM THIS PUBLICATION WILL BE APPLIED TO THE BENEFIT OF SUNDAY SCHOOLS.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following Sermon was composed in the midst of much unavoidable interruption and distress, during the melancholy interval between the death and burial of a beloved Child, and preached the day after her interment.

Some *of those who heard it* felt *consolation* at the time, *and expressed a wish to see it* printed, *that they might have its comforts in* possession.—*If any afflicted parent should reap that satisfaction from reading, which the Author has found from writing this discourse, the end of its being published will be answered, and the glory of God promoted.*

SERMON.

II. SAMUEL, Ch. XII. Ver. 22, 23.

" And he ſaid, While the child was yet alive, I faſted and wept:
" for I ſaid, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me,
" that the child may live?—But now he is dead, wherefore
" ſhould I faſt? Can I bring him back again? I ſhall go to him,
" but he ſhall not return to me."

THIS conduct of the king of Iſrael was undoubtedly the reſult of calm reflection and ſound reaſon. When ſickneſs, inflicted by the finger of God, had ſeized, and threatened to deprive him of his darling child, how could he have conducted himſelf in a more proper and becoming manner than he is repreſented to have done in this intereſting paſſage of the ſacred ſcriptures? While it was *yet alive*, he

humbled himſelf before his adorable Creator, and bewailed the multiplicity of his tranſgreſſions. Conſcious of having greatly ſinned,—his unfeigned contrition bears a due proportion to his crimes. He denies himſelf the ordinary refreſhments of nature; and, proſtrating himſelf upon the earth *all night*, he vents his grief in ſhowers of tears; firmly perſuaded that He, whoſe omnipotent diſpenſation had brought his child to the verge of the grave, could alſo, if he pleaſed, reſtore it again to health. " Who can tell," ſaith he, " whether God will be gracious unto me, that the child may live?"—In vain did the elders of his houſe attempt to raiſe him from the earth; his ſorrow and affection were too deeply rooted to admit ſuch imperfect conſolation: And as his hopes were not to be extinguiſhed whilſt a ray of light was emitted from the glimmering lamp of life, with unremitted fervor and perſeverance he continues to beſeech God for his child.

Now,

Now, if we attend to the meſſage which Nathan the prophet had previouſly delivered to him from God, that the child ſhould ſurely die,—we might be apt to conſider David's zealous importunity as preſumptuous and offenſive. But it muſt be remembered, that the purpoſes of God concerning mankind are generally conditional :—He will threaten a nation with deſtruction, for the wickedneſs of its inhabitants; but if they humble themſelves, and turn from their evil ways, He will alſo turn from his fierce anger, and repent of the evil which, during their impenitency, He had denounced againſt them. In like manner, (with reſpect to individuals) whilſt we continue wilful and rebellious ſinners, we are under the curſe of the law, under the ſentence of death ; and God hath ſworn, that as long as we continue ſuch, we ſhall not enter into his eternal reſt :—and alſo, that " He hath no pleaſure in the death of a ſinner, but rather that he would return from his evil ways and live." This is the univerſal condition ;

dition: " If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye, through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." David's conduct, therefore, was so far from being reprehensible, that it bespoke at once his pious confidence and natural affection. " Who can tell," saith he, " whether God will be gracious to me?" His parental feelings were alive for the sufferings of his beloved child: his devotion carried him to the throne of mercy in its behalf; and that not in a cold and lifeless address,—but with fervent, hearty prayers,—with strong cries and tears, expressive of that weight of sorrow which overwhelmed his soul. Convinced that the ways of Providence are inscrutable to short-sighted mortals, he was determined to seek for mercy at the hands of a long-suffering and gracious God;—peradventure, thought he, He *may vouchsafe* to bless me. However, notwithstanding all his tender efforts, the beloved infant, on the seventh day, " slept to wake no more."

Now

Now let us contemplate the behaviour of the "Man after God's own heart," at this *trying* juncture. The ſeverity of David's affliction, during the ſickneſs of the child, had been ſo great as effectually to deter his ſervants from acquainting him with the melancholy cataſtrophe. For, "Behold," ſay they, "he would not hearken unto us when we ſpake unto him, while the child was yet alive," what bounds will he ſet to his ſorrow! "How will he vex himſelf, when we tell him that the child is dead!" Alarmed, however, by their whiſpering, the vigilant father perceived what had happened, and demanded "If the child was dead,—and they ſaid, He is dead." Far from exceſſive wailing and vehement lamentation, he did not even rend his cloaths (which was cuſtomary amongſt the Jews on thoſe mournful occaſions.) No: "He aroſe from the earth, waſhed and anointed himſelf, changed his apparel, and came into the Houſe of the Lord, and worſhipped." Then (to the confuſion and utter aſtoniſhment of

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all around him) " he came to his own houſe, and when he required bread, they ſet it before him and he did eat." The ſurpriſe of his ſervants cannot be expreſſed in language more emphatic than in the words of Holy Writ. Unable to account for ſuch ſeemingly inconſiſtent conduct, they exclaim, " What thing is this that thou haſt done? Thou didſt faſt and weep for the child while it was alive, but when the child was dead, thou didſt ariſe and eat bread!" He clears his conduct, and juſtifies his behaviour in the words of the text: " While the child was yet alive, I faſted and wept; for I ſaid, Who can tell whether God will be gracious unto me, that the child may live?—But now he is dead, wherefore ſhould I faſt? Can I bring him back again? I ſhall go to him, but he ſhall not return to me."

Let us endeavour to derive ſpiritual improvement from reflections upon theſe words; in doing which, permit

permit me to uſe great plainneſs of ſpeech, and diſcharge with *fidelity* the ſacred truſt committed to me. And, as both you and I ſhall anſwer at the day of judgment, for this bleſſed opportunity of enjoying the means of Grace, may God Almighty vouchſafe his bleſſing, and enable *me ſo* to *ſpeak* and *you* to *hear*, that his word may be glorified, and prove " a ſavour of life unto life," ſpiritual and eternal unto us all.

The uſe of every means, human and divine, to ſave life, is not only allowable but our bounden duty. We may adminiſter medicine to heal our ſickneſs,—to allay the parching thirſt of burning fevers—to correct the acrimony of vitiated juices—to mitigate excruciating pain, or to refreſh and exhilarate our waſted ſpirits. And we may go further: We may not only uſe our *own* endeavours, but alſo have recourſe to *Heaven* for aſſiſtance. Indeed, the *latter never ſhould be neglected;* for in vain do we call in

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the aid of phyſicians, (how eminent ſoever their profeſſional abilities)—" Vain is the help of man," unleſs attended by the bleſſing of the Lord. David faſted and wept, and prayed for the recovery of his child; ſo may we, in ſimilar circumſtances. But let us obſerve, that David's requeſt was not *unſeaſonable;* it was made whilſt there was hope—" the child was yet alive." But no ſooner did he perceive that God had no reſpect unto his offering, and that the object of his interceſſion had paſſed " that bourn from whence no traveller returns," than " he aroſe from the earth:" his heart, which had been fondly doating on terreſtrial good, was lifted up to the God of Heaven: " He waſhed and anointed himſelf;" having purified his conſcience by humiliation and ſincere contrition, and prepared his ſoul for a befitting acceſs to the temple of the Lord. He then " changed his apparel," which was unclean; his habiliments of mourning were laid aſide, for garments of praiſe, and robes of righteouſneſs,—and

" he

" he came into the Houſe of the Lord and worſhipped." Then, after having paid his adoration to the Moſt High God, but not *till* then, he came into his own houſe, and innocently indulged almoſt exhauſted nature with that neceſſary refreſhment of which he had ſo long and ſo reſolutely denied himſelf.

Happy, thrice happy would it be for us, if we could always follow the ſame ſteps! When we are chaſtiſed for ſin, as David was, if we could " hear the rod, and who hath appointed it;" if, inſtead of depending ſolely on an arm of fleſh, we would ſeek aſſiſtance from the Great Phyſician of Souls, " the Lord Jehovah, in whom alone is everlaſting ſtrength;" and by an humble reſignation to his bleſſed will (knowing that he chaſtiſes, us even in his moſt afflicting diſpenſations, leſs than our iniquities have deſerved) ſay, with unfeigned piety, as good old Eli did, " It is the Lord, let him do what ſeem-

eth him good;" and ſhew forth his praiſe in the midſt of the great congregation.

On recovery from dangerous ſickneſs,—on delivery from diſtreſs, whether of body or mind,—how much more becoming rational creatures is it to viſit the Temple of God, and to beg his bleſſing *there*,—than to fly after idle amuſements, and unprofitable, perhaps diſſolute companions, in order to divert a melancholy hour, and diſſipate ſerious reflection! *that* reflection which conſtitutes us *men*, and which, if attended to, will hereafter make us Angels of Light.

But let us return and examine David's good reaſons for his conduct, which appeared to his ſervants very ſtrange and inconſiſtent. *Now*, ſaith he, "*my child is dead.*" I know that "it is appointed," by the unalterable decrees of Heaven, "unto men once to die:" and *that ſentence* is *now executed*, with reſpect to *him*: "Wherefore then ſhould I faſt?" Will

God

God be pleaſed to counteract the Laws of Nature for the lamentations of a worm,—a ſinful worm? Will he command the grave to yield up her dead for me,—for *me*, who have ſo grievouſly offended him? or, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive?" Can I, do you ſuppoſe, by my own power, re-animate the pale, cold corpſe, and waken into life that ſtiffened lump of clay?—No, no!—vain were the attempt, fruitleſs the endeavour,—impious even the ſuppoſition, with all my faſting, tears and prayers, for now even "an *Angel's* arm cannot ſnatch him from the grave."

But we have *another* weighty reaſon why David would not indulge exceſſive grief:—Not only becauſe it was *vain* and *ineffectual;* but alſo becauſe it would have robbed him of that precious time which he intended ſhould be ſpent to a much better purpoſe: "I ſhall go to him, but he ſhall not return to me." This was a concluſive argument. Behold, ſaith he, my own days are but "as an hand-breadth," and

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the "ſhadows of *my* evening are ſtretching out" a-pace. I know not the day of my death—but certain I am, as of my preſent exiſtence, "that I *ſhall go to him.*" Am not I then concerned to make a preparation for that *inevitable* moment?—*that* moment which ſhall number *me* with the dead, and conſign me to the manſions of happineſs, or the regions of deſpair! Is it not my intereſt, rather to work out my own ſalvation, than to pour out unavailing lamentations for thoſe, who, having eſcaped the miſeries of this ſinful world, are now in poſſeſſion of a bliſsful eternity? Will not this be my wiſdom, to ſecure for myſelf a place among thoſe bleſſed ones,—that, when my Lord ſhall remove me from this "corruptible crown, I may ſit down with Abraham, and Iſaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of Heaven, and inherit a crown of glory, that fadeth not away?"

Here, my Brethren, is a comprehenſive leſſon,—a leſſon, which, in one reſpect or other, may prove inſtructive to us all!

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In order more effectually to anſwer my preſent purpoſe, let me invite you to attend, with me, a few of the "repoſitories of the dead."——It is not my intention to excite the tender emotions of your ſoul, by painting their languiſhment on the bed of death. I would not call to your buſy remembrance their reſtleſs nights,—their bitter agonies,—their heart-rending convulſions, which at laſt ſubjected them to the dreary empire of the griſly monarch.—— Nor would I exhibit to your tear-full eyes a ghaſtly ſpectacle in all the "gloomy horrors of the grave."—No; I would only mention, in plain terms, what two or three of *thoſe were*, more powerfully to perſuade *us* to *be what we ought.*

Beneath that ſplendid monument there lie the remains of a youth, once elegant, polite, "gay as the lark, and thoughtleſs too as gay." Indulged with all his heart could wiſh,—no bounds were ſet to his voluptuous enjoyments. Calm reflection was a ſtranger to his boſom: Or, if by chance the buſy

meddler

meddler dared to intrude, at an hour when tired nature required a refpite from unremitted rounds of diffipation and excefs, he foon difmiffed the unwelcome vifitant, until a more convenient feafon :—But, alas ! to *him* that feafon *never came ;*—for fuch he lived, and fuch he died ; and died, infenfible (from the malignity of the difeafe which terminated his career of life) of that punifhment which awaits the finally impenitent finner.

Muft it not fting his guilty parent to the heart, to reflect, that to *him* was owing, in a great meafure, the vices of his fon ! Without one advantage of religious education,—*he was*, what his aged *father alfo is*, a practical atheift,—" a ftranger to the covenant of promife, without God," and confequently " having no hope in the world."

O thoughtlefs wretch ! canft thou bear the fad reflection? Through thy neglect, perhaps, the offfpring

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of thy body is now in eternal torment! And thou alſo art treading the ſame downward path! Canſt thou purſue thy favourite ſchemes of traffic, and never once call to mind, that thou waſt born for eternity,—that thou art already gray in iniquity,—and that, " there is but a ſtep betwixt thee and death?" Dareſt thou give ſleep to thine eyes, under the *poſſibility*, that *this night*, before another Sun ariſes, *thy ſoul may be required of thee?* O " conſider this, ye that forget God, leſt he pluck you away, and there be none to deliver you!"

The Inſcription upon that plain tomb informs us of a very *different* character. Early impreſſed with a ſenſe of Religion,—trained up from a child in the way he ſhould go, He perſevered in the bleſſed path to the cloſe of life. Unpractiſed in vicious habits,—a ſtranger to immorality,—an avowed and implacable enemy to profaneneſs,—he choſe Wiſdom for his companion and his friend: Directed by her ſacred

pre-

precepts, as he grew in ſtature, he increaſed in "underſtanding, and in favour with God and man." To pronounce an eulogy on his character, would be pleaſing to congenial ſouls,—but at preſent, is impracticable: Suffice it for their comfort to ſay, that when the hungry monſter, Death, (who "devours his millions at a meal") ſnatched this precious morſel, he obeyed the ſummons with an unruffled ſoul, with a placid countenance, and a hope full of immortality, through FAITH IN THE MERITS OF HIS REDEEMER. In life admired, beloved,—I might almoſt ſay, adored,—by all who knew him;—in death by all deplored.——Different, widely different, indeed, muſt be the ſenſations of thoſe who gave *him* birth, as alſo of the parents of *her* who repoſes under that little hillock. Underneath it reſt the aſhes of a favourite CHILD. Unable to diſcern good from evil,—not guilty of actual tranſgreſſion,—not even capable of giving perſonal offence to God or man—the little ſtranger ſtole gently away from the fond embraces

of

of her parents, and mingled with the celeſtial inhabitants. O, happy probationer! (we may juſtly exclaim) " Happy probationer, indeed, who art thus accepted without being exerciſed!" And have *parents* of ſuch glorious beings any need of conſolation for *their* loſs? Is it neceſſary to recite the dangers which their bleſſed offſpring may have eſcaped from an unkind and malicious world!—from a world replete with temptations, and chequered with afflictions, but at beſt affording a deluſive kind of happineſs; where we are " not more the *children*, than ſure *heirs of pain*." Ought not the moſt unbounded wiſhes of the tendereſt parent to be fully gratified upon reflecting,—that OF SUCH IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD!" and that in the world which they now enjoy, there is neither ſorrow, nor miſery, nor pain? Tears are there wiped from every eye; *there* are they ſecure from every attack of ſickneſs, and exempt eternally from death. O glorious inheritance, where thoſe bleſſed Angels enjoy the beatific viſion of their heavenly Father!—baſk in the effulgence of

the Divine Preſence, and " gather immortality from life's fair tree, faſt by the throne of God."

The laſt, but not the leaſt conſideration, why we ſhould not indulge immoderate grief for the loſs of our children or friends, is pointed out in the text, as *vain* and *ineffectual.* We cannot, by all our grief and ſorrow, bring them back again; but we may do what is infinitely better (as we *muſt go to them*, or in other words, as we muſt *inevitably die)* we may *prepare* ourſelves for *that* important change.

" Men, Brethren, and Fathers, let me freely ſpeak unto you." How ſtands the account between God and our ſouls? What preparation have we made for eternity? Such enquiries as theſe deeply concern us all. Are our hearts ſtill enamoured of unlawful pleaſures,—or rivetted to the periſhing things of time and ſenſe?—Are we entangled in the ſilken ſnares of vice,—or bound in the ſtronger cords of irreligion? The friendly admonition of the prophet

phet is then very applicable to us: "Arise, and depart" from such unprofitable and dangerous pursuits, "for this is not your rest." "Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes," saith the living God, "cease to do evil, learn to do well." And, O! let us not be tardy in reducing to practice those divine precepts, lest we be "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin," "given up to a reprobate mind," and "iniquity prove our ruin."

Have we, on the contrary, seen into the error of our ways, and repented of our folly in the Land of Hope? Can we *now* look forward to that awful moment, which is to determine our everlasting state, with devout assurance?—Have we experienced "a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness?" Have we found, by saving faith, that "Christ is precious" unto our souls! And that his all-atoning blood cleanseth from all sin? Have we, "as concerning our former conversation, put off

off the old man, which is corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts, and, being renewed in the spirit of our minds, put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness?" In one word, is "CHRIST IN US THE HOPE OF GLORY?"

If so, happy *are* we! "Whereunto we have *already* attained:" let us *continue* to "walk by the same rule,—to mind the same thing,—and press towards the mark for the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus!" Giving *all diligence*, that we may be found of him perfect;—let us not be of the number "of those who draw back unto perdition, but of those who persevere unto the saving of their souls." "*Only* let our conversation be as *becometh the gospel of Christ*." Then thrice happy shall we be *for ever*; because, "when He, who is our life, shall appear" at the last day, *we also* "shall appear with him in glory," and "ENTER INTO THE JOY OF OUR LORD." Amen.